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Following is an address by M. Peter McPherson, Administrator of the Agency for International Development (AID), before the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., November 25, 1985.

Starting about 20 years ago, there began to be a growing awareness of the high rates of population growth in many developing countries of the world. Indeed, rates of population growth in many poor countries today are as high as 3% or 4% a year. This contrasts with much slower growth rates in developing countries only a few decades ago. The recent and unprecedented growth rates are a consequence of lower mortality without corresponding reductions in fertility. Donor agencies can be proud of the role they have played in significantly improving the standards of health in developing countries.

I am sure in this room there is a variety of viewpoints on the subject of population growth. Some believe current high rates of growth constitute a global crisis; others are equally convinced that there is no cause for alarm. For some time there has been an active debate surrounding these differences. The question has centered on the relationship between population growth and economic growth and on abortion.

This debate has been characterized by strongly held and often polarized convictions. But the debate has usually failed to take into account a most important set of reasons for family planning programs. Specifically, there has been little attention to the interests of families and individuals. This is unfortunate since the availability or lack of family planning services is of enormous consequence to some families and individuals. These family and individual interests fall into three categories:

- The desire of couples to determine the size and spacing of their family;
- Mother and child survival; and
- Reduction of abortion.

The Right of the Family To Choose

The right of the family to choose the number and spacing of their children was strongly reaffirmed by international consensus at the International Conference on Population in Mexico City in 1984. Governments should not dictate the number of children couples can have. However, family planning services should be encouraged so that people really do have the option, if they desire, of fewer children.

Families make decisions in their own interest based upon their social and economic and religious situation. Change, including urbanization and lower child mortality, has created a new situation for millions of families throughout the developing world. Once, most families wanted and needed more children to contribute to the family's agricultural production and to ensure that enough children survived to care for their parents in their old age. Fifty percent or more of the populations of many developing countries are now urban, and there is even a very strong urban trend in Africa. Moreover, many children who would have died formerly now live because of improved health services. Accordingly, the world is simply very different for many families, and they need and want fewer children.

Also, many families feel they can do more for each of their children—for example, provide a better education—if they have a smaller family. In many areas of the developing world, couples are having eight or nine or more children. When the financial and emotional resources of these families are divided among the children, the frequent result is that the children are undernourished and there is little money for education and health care for each child. Family planning services would give these couples the opportunity, which many currently do not have, of concentrating the resources of the family on fewer children. We can debate the impact of population growth on economic growth in a country, but there is no question that many families feel they can do more for each child if they have fewer children.

Fewer children are an option which American families take for granted. I suspect that most of us here are pleased that we have, and our children will have, available the information and services so that we can decide the size and spacing of our own families. We must remember that these services are not

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available to millions of families in the Third World. The unfulfilled desire of Third World families to have fewer children is not just Western speculation. Surveys show a large number of women who would like to space births or limit their family size but cannot because no services are available. The percent of such women is highest where few services are available—it is 67% in Bangladesh where only 13% of couples use contraceptives; 22% in Costa Rica where 65% of couples are currently using contraceptives.[1] A carefully monitored project in Matlab Thana in Bangladesh demonstrated that when high in quality family planning services were made available to poor villagers on a voluntary basis, contraceptive prevalence increased from 6.9% to 35%.[2]

Health and Survival of Mothers and Children

The health and survival of mothers and children provides a second important reason for family planning. We know that one of the most serious consequences of women having many children in quick succession is that more children and mothers die. Studies of child mortality conducted in 26 countries have confirmed that a child born within 2 years of an earlier birth is twice as likely to die as a child born after an interval of 2 or more years. Also, the older child is more likely to die if there is another child born within 2 years.[3] It is estimated that spacing all births at least 2 years apart would reduce the deaths of children under 4 years by 21%.[4]

Maternal health is also affected by the number and spacing of children and the age of the mother. As many as 200,000 maternal deaths per year are attributed to too many pregnancies, too early or too late in the reproductive period.[5]

These are dramatic statistics that family planning saves lives: it is a critical component of mother and child survival. The Administration, with strong congressional support, has launched a strong health component of our foreign aid program, focused particularly on interventions to save children—for example, immunizations and oral rehydration therapy. It makes sense to encourage a life-saving family planning service as part of our health efforts.

Reduction of Abortion

A third reason for family planning is the reduction of abortion. When couples want fewer children and family planning services are not accessible, abortion is often resorted to. This is true whether or not it is legal. It is estimated that more than 25 million abortions occur in developing countries each year, compared with 113 million births.[6] Evidence from some Latin American and Asian countries indicates that as many as one out of three women have had an abortion. Many of these abortions would be prevented if family planning services were available. The Mexican Social Security Administration estimates that it has prevented 360,000 abortions since family planning services began in 1972.[7] In Chile, the number of women seeking help in hospitals for complications from illegal abortions declined substantially after 1965 when modern family planning services began to become widely available.[8]

Based solely on these three family and individual needs—i.e., the families' desire to determine the number and spacing of children; mother and child survival; and reduction of abortion—I believe assistance to family planning programs is necessary.

Economic Growth and Development

Next, I would like to discuss the relationship between economic growth and population growth. This relationship has been the center of recent controversy. The debate has tended to be characterized by two extremes.

Some have argued that rapid population growth rates are a worldwide crisis and a primary reason why more progress has not been made in the Third World. The crisis perception of population growth has been tempered in the minds of some—though not all—because of declining birth rates in several countries and the recognition that human resources and technological innovation provide a key response to the needs of a growing population.

Unfortunately, a careful study of the data does not fully clarify the relationship between population growth and economic growth. For one thing, it is difficult to separate out population growth rates from all other factors affecting economic growth. Nevertheless, it appears that a number of countries with sustained economic growth in recent decades also had widespread and effective family planning services and reduced population growth rates. The Pacific Rim, for instance—Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and others—comes to mind. It is not clear how much of the population growth reductions in these economies came because of economic growth or, on the other hand, what contribution the reduced population growth rates made to economic growth. In any case, in the Pacific Rim the availability of family planning services, moderate population growth rates, and sustained economic growth tend to go hand in hand.

In contrast, there are a number of countries where there are high population growth rates and slow economic growth. The situation in Africa is especially noteworthy. In many countries there has been a negative per capita growth for a sustained period and very high population growth rates.

Let me review the arguments of those who say that very high population growth rates reduce economic growth in some countries. They argue that a poor nation with too high a population growth rate cannot make the investment in education, health, and so forth,

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[1] Kathy A. London, et al. "Fertility and Family Planning Surveys: An Update," in *Population Reports*, Series M, No. 8, Sept.-Oct., 1985.

[2] Lincoln C. Chen, et al. "Estimating and Partitioning the Mortality Impact of Several Modern Medical Technologies on Basic Health Services," in *IUSSP International Population Conference Proceedings*, Manila, Vol. 2, 1985.

[3] Deborah Maine and Regina McNamara. *Birth Spacing and Child Survival*, Columbia University, 1985.

[4] James Trussel and Anne Pebley. "The Potential Impact of Changes in Fertility on Infant, Child and Maternal Mortality," in *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 15, No. 6, Part 1, Nov.-Dec., 1984.

[5] Ward Rinehart. "Healthier Mothers and Children Through Family Planning," in *Population Reports*, Series J, No. 27, May-June, 1984.

[6] Laurie S. Liskin. "Complications of Abortion in Developing Countries," in *Population Reports*, Series F, No.7, July 1980.

[7] Dorothy Nortman, et al. "A Cost-benefit Analysis of the Family Planning Program of the Mexican Social Security Administration," paper presented at the IUSSP, International Population Conference, 1985.

[8] Deborah Maine. *Family Planning: Its Impact on the Health of Women and Children*, Columbia University, 1981

because of the ever-growing wave of new children. Some also argue that population growth rates can have a negative impact on the degradation of the land.

The other side contends that nations, over time, are able to adjust to the pressures of more people; indeed, that the pressure may be a very important stimulus to innovation and growth. It seems to me that those taking the position that nations can adjust must assume a degree of political flexibility. They may underestimate, for example, the tribal conflicts, the urban exploitation of a rural majority of many African countries, and famines. Also, those who assume that all nations can adjust may not be realistic in judging the ability of fairly primitive societies to obtain technological innovation. In short, the situation may be so severe that reasonable adjustments will not occur in a timely fashion and countries just sink deeper into poverty.

Let's talk about economic development for a moment. I think that some components are clearly needed to obtain economic growth—components about which there is a growing consensus.

The first component is sound market-oriented economic policies, without which the economic and social aspirations of countries cannot be achieved. There also are several other components which countries usually need to meet to achieve sustained growth. Among the most important is human resource development—for example, education and training. (Nobel Prize winner Dr. Theodore Shultz has documented the role of human resources in economic growth.) Another critical component is technology. Without the Green Revolution technology, India might well still have terrible famines rather than being more or less self-sufficient in grain production. It is no coincidence that Africa, with its low economic growth, has a very high rate of illiteracy and needs a Green Revolution of its own.

I would like to note that AID has worked hard for the last 5 years to promote sound economic policies and is spending substantial money on both training and research in the Third World.

Yes, sound economic policies and various development efforts are critical to economic growth. However, as suggested above, family planning has been part of successful packages in some key countries in recent years. Based upon that, I feel that sound economic and population policies are mutually supportive components of a country's plans for economic growth. This was the position taken by the Administration in Mexico City, and it remains our position.

As I have stated above, I think that we should support strong family planning programs in the interests of families and individuals. I think that these interests alone justify the program even if there were no impact on economic growth. The impact of population growth on economic growth is debatable. But almost no one argues that family planning hurts economic growth, and it is rare, indeed, to hear it argued that very rapid population growth contributes to economic growth. In any case, I think the above observations about Asia and Africa make family planning a common sense bet for economic growth. I know that the computers do not give a clear answer, but, as I travel around the world and feel and see Lagos, Mexico City, and Dhaka, I am willing to go with the bet.

Support for Family Planning

In fiscal year 1985, AID spent $290 million (2.5% of our total economic assistance budget) on international family planning assistance. This is up from the $190 million which was spent in 1981. This Administration has always asked Congress for as much or more for family planning as we did the year before. There should be no doubt as to our commitment to this effort. I believe that this is money well spent. Even with such a small portion of our total budget, we have provided millions of families with the ability to achieve their own family goals.

Now let me turn to the issue of abortion. This Administration has been consistent in its opposition to abortion as a method of family planning and its strong support for the availability of voluntary family planning services. AID's goal has been to administer fairly and with common sense this two-prong policy. We have been in the political crossfire. Neither pro-life groups nor family planning groups fully trusted the other, and AID has been caught in the middle. Nevertheless, it is my view that we have faithfully carried out both policies in the best way possible. We have applied our antiabortion and pro-family planning positions to the particular circumstances of our program. You can count on our continuing to pursue our two-prong policy. I sincerely invite pro-life groups to carefully review how effective we have been in opposing abortion. I also ask that pro-family planning groups note that the Reagan Administration has always asked Congress for as much or more money for family planning as we have asked the year before. This is a program which has not been cut by the Administration, and that truly is saying something in these times of budgetary stringency.

Conclusion

I have not discussed the political stability of friendly countries and the impact that population growth rates may have on such countries. Obviously, all of our friends have not been models of sound economic policies, and the adjustment process may be costly to them and us.

In closing, I want to reiterate the important impact which voluntary family planning services have upon developing countries. For the family, the ability to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of one's own children is basic. For a mother, the ability to space or limit her pregnancies may mean the difference between illness and health, between life and death. For children to be reasonably spaced may mean the chance of adequate nutrition or even the chance to survive at all. For the family, fewer, well-spaced pregnancies may mean the chance for educational opportunities for all children. For parents, it may mean control over their own decisions. It may also mean the avoidance of the tragic abortion which is often the last resort of desperate parents. For a father and mother coping with poverty and the disintegration of traditional support systems, it may mean a lessening of strains on the family structure. For these reasons alone, international family planning programs should be supported.

Finally, we believe that experiences in Asia and Africa have something to say about family planning and economic growth. Accordingly, we see family planning and economic policies as mutually supportive components of economic growth. ■

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